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A-ONE #0818 05/05/06

~ Vista Delayed Again? ~ People Are Talking! ~ Ballmer’s New Boast
~ Get Fired for Web Use? ~ Professors Ban Laptops ~ Yahoo Faces Suit!

~ Spammers vs. Anti-Spam ~ Macs Are Virus Targets ~ Free Phone Numbers!
~ Doom Creators Go Mobile ~ Islamic Game Propaganda ~ Vista Delayed Again?

-* Rhode Island Going Wireless! *-
-* Spyware Operator To Pay $4 Million! *-
-* MySpace Faces Call To Protect Children More *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Retirement, even a temporary one, is great! Okay, it's taken a couple of days to get used to the fact that this is not just a short vacation. It's not been as easy as I thought that it would be, but it's getting easier day by day. The lousy weather earlier in the week gave me the opportunity to get some much needed rest. My yard work is almost down, but still some to go. The gardens need attacking soon, as well. As the weather improved, I had a few trees either pruned or removed. Now I can seriously consider that sprinkler system we've been talking about the past two years! During one of those rainy days, I picked up numerous supplies for a couple of my wife's "Honey-Do" list items. Hmmmm, I've seemed to have forgotten getting out to the golf course! Next week is soon enough, as the weather gets better!

Last week, I mentioned that I should be back in a better frame of mind to finally get down and write about something more than just the weather and my various home projects. Heck, they've even been boring me after awhile! One article that I came across (and in this week's issue) has piqued my interest and is a good candidate to editorialize: personal internet use while on the job.

In a recent case in New York City, an administrative law judge ruled in favor of a Department of Education employee - preventing the employee from being fired. Instead, the judge recommended he receive the slightest reprimand. At issue, the employee was using the internet for personal matters after he was told not to do so. The judge, in his decision, ruled that the internet was a modern equivalent or reading a newspaper or talking on the telephone.

Now, the article isn't perfectly clear whether or not this employee was "on the job", or surfing the web during "down" time or during breaks. However, I get the sense that there's truth to a little bit of both. Additionally, the article also mentions a survey of workers' work habits - doing personal business at work, and work business at home. Is there a trade-off here? Personally, I don't agree. If I do work at home (and this is from someone who used to do that), unless I've been asked to do some work at home, it was my choice. Can I rationalize that because I do work at home, that gives me the right to do personal stuff at work, during work hours? Well, I guess that I could rationalize that, but I'm not sure that the rationale would hold up with my boss. And, if I were to use the internet during "down" times (why isn't my boss keeping me busy, you might ask), would my employer still have a right to say I can't? With today's problems with viruses and spyware, I'd be hesitant to say I'd disagree with an employer. Without those threats, I have no problem with an employee surfing the web for

legitimate and legal/acceptable personal reasons during his or her lunch or other type of break.

However, a lot can be said for an employer's rights to make rules pertaining to equipment that they own, and how it is to be used. Many companies ban the use of office phones for personal use, for example. Should a PC be treated any differently? I think that the rules need to be updated to reflect today's office environment. I think that these rules will need to be written to accommodate employer's thought process; I don't believe that this is something that can be universally decided by a judge in a court of law. I also believe that employees need to be thoroughly informed as to what is acceptable, or not. What do you think? Drop us a line and let us know!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and our we had a little taste of warmth today here in New England. It was actually pretty nice after several days of cool, damp, rainy weather. Bright sun, dry air... and warmth. That deep, penetrating warmth that only the sun can provide.

I can remember being a kid and noticing that, no matter how long I left my spiffy watch with the luminous dial under a lamp, the glow it gave off never compared to the glow it gave off after being "charged" by the sun.

Of course, now I know about nuclear fusion and CMEs and solar storms, and it doesn't surprise me that the sun does a better job than the measly few volts that we put through tungsten filaments to provide light.

Rather than surprising me, it... well, amuses me. It amuses me that, no matter how many times Mother Nature shows us her superiority in every way, we still have the audacity to think that we can either control or trick her. What we really need to do is learn to work with her and respect her.

On that auspicious (or was it 'suspicious'?) note, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

'Iron Joe' asks about the Falcon "Clock Patch":

"What are the symptoms of a stock Falcon if the clock patch is not installed? Are the modifications on the CzubaTech site are recommended to do or are they only just CT60 specific?"

Rodolphe Czuba tells Joe:

"The modification on my web site seems to work fine on stock falcon...

It is :
- 33 ohms resistors on R216, R221 & R222 (some stock falcon have 0 ohm on R221).

- 68 ohms resistor to ground as line terminator on the SDMA clk trace just before the entry of the SDMA clock pin

The 74F04 or 08 modification is not recommended for CT60/63, even at 16 Mhz falcon bus (not boosted)."

Janez Valent adds:

"Mine symptoms were random SCSI locking when transferring more data.. Locking was also connected with DMA load, so if i used higher resolutions in more colors, locking was worse... hdd led just lit and all freezed till I reboot.... I had revJ board tried all sorts of patches back then, none worked correctly, but on end CT2 fixed it for good :) However I didn't try patch from Rodolphe, worth a try, his solutions usual work... On other hand, revJ seems to be odd board ."

'Cyril' asks for help with iConnect and N.AES:

"I try to connect to the net with iconnect 1.7 (and 1.8 too) and N.aes 2 but it's impossible. Iconnect run correctly but PPP negotiation failed when I try to connect to my ISP. I have no problem with same config in MagiC."

Gergard Stoll asks Cyril:
"What rsdeamon.prg do you use? The latest version work only with MagiC. Try it with the old one.

RSDAEMON.NEW\RSDAEMON.PRG 5835 Bytes
RSDAEMON.OLD\RSDAEMON.PRG 3971 Bytes "

'Phantomm' tells us that he....

"Was going thru some of my Atari Stuff and came upon a Mega STE/TT Keyboard. The colour of letters/numbers and etc on the keys are a Blue/Green.

And the keyboard case is white. Not a off white or light grey. Is this the normal colour?"

Mark Bedingfield tells Phantomm:

"For a TT, yes. The MegaSTE is grey and the TT is bone/cream. Quite nice I think."

Well folks, there weren't a lot of messages in the UseNet this week. I guess that most folks are out there enjoying the warm weather instead of banging away on their computers. Oh well. Let's hope that they come back soon and type like the dickens, huh? <grin>

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Soul Caliber' On PS2!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" 'Doom' Creators Go Mobile!
Lara Croft Does Nintendo!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Soul Calibur 3 on PlayStation 2

In the early days of 3d fighting games, the original 'Soul Calibur' for the Playstation became a big hit because of its weapons-based fighting, variety of characters, and deep gameplay. In the ensuing six years, the 'Soul Calibur' sequels reaped the benefits of advancements in computer technology and the birth of the Playstation 2. 'Soul Calibur 3' is the latest in the series, and this sequel is the best it has ever been.

What keeps a video game franchise fresh and appealing with each sequel is the ability of its creators to keep what worked well and add more interesting features as you go along. 'Soul Calibur 3' has a ton of characters, including nearly every character from the first two titles plus three new fighters: Cassandra, Tira, and Zasalamel. Each character has their own weapons, and with these weapons come fighting styles with unique strengths and weaknesses. Zasalamel, for instance, uses a large scythe, so most of his attacks take a sweeping, circular motion. Maxi, on the other hand, uses nuchaku in a flashy, fast manner that screams style over substance, to the point of leaving openings for counter-attacks. There are more than a half dozen unique fighting styles in total, and with the ability to juggle enemies in midair and chain your moves (if the right

moves are used) how you win a fight is not limited even slightly.

Besides the basic Story and Vs. mode, you have the new ’Chronicles of the Sword’ mode, Tournament mode, Arena mode and character creation mode. Character creation mode allows you to pick a fighter of any gender and any fighting style you wish. Initially, you have a choice of a select number of fighting styles, from ninja to dancer to barbarian. You can then choose from all available clothing and accessories your character will wear and choose the way your fighter looks, from skin color to a variety of faces. As you play story mode, the ’Chronicles of the Sword’ mode or the Tournament mode, you win more items for all of your characters, whether they be originally created or one of the original fighters. Then you can go to the shop and buy these items with the gold you accumulated.

Tournament mode is nothing new to fans of fighting games. You have a set of fighters who pair off until one man, woman, or supernatural creature is the victor. Arena mode, however, is somewhat different: you get a different objective for each type of arena fight. In one, you will have to hit your opponent and collect the money that appears, while in another, you have to chase your opponent and defeat them before time expires. With each arena challenge you complete, you get another challenge, with dozens of arena challenges in total, each with a difficulty level.

The Chronicles of the Sword mode is the most interesting mode besides playing the story or Vs modes. Chronicles of the Sword prompts you to create a commander of military forces to fight in a little real-time strategy action. You and the other fighters under your command are on an interactive map where strongholds and castles are your targets and your enemies aim to vanquish all of your forces. Some strongholds have special battle conditions built into them, such as granting your opponent the ability to heal himself, or the power to lower your defense. In each Chronicle, or level, you gain new allies and you also have the opportunity to create more original characters to fight on your side. For each Chronicle, you have certain objectives to accomplish and secret objectives that you gain bonuses for when a Chronicle is complete. You can use as many units as you have available to attack whatever enemy unit or stronghold you want, but the game ends if all of your characters die in battle.

Whenever you try to destroy a stronghold and an enemy occupies it, you have a decisive battle that decides who gets to keep the stronghold. You then go into an actual 3D fight. Fights can go on between many opponents; you can be handicapped one-on-four, or it can be an even two-on-two. If you are victorious, your path is cleared and you can take over any empty enemy strongholds on the map. Combining a few aspects of real-time strategy with the gripping 3D fights of the ’Soul Calibur’ engine make the Chronicles of the Sword interesting, but if they had put this much time story-wise into the actual Tales of Souls story mode, it would have been greatly appreciated. Still, the Chronicles of the Sword mode puts a pretty little bow on top of what is a great package - the incredible ’Soul Calibur 3.’

Ratings (1-10):

Graphics 9.5. Each character looks unique and everything you see has a magnificent level of detail.

Gameplay 9.5. ’Soul Calibur 3’ is not only the best weapon-based game out there, it’s also one of the best fighting games, period.

Story 7.0. Stories have never really been that important to a fighting game, but at least ’Soul Calibur 3’ tries to keep you interested in the

third battle for the cursed sword and the Azure Knight.

Replayability 10. ’Soul Calibur 3’ was created with replayability in mind, with many unlockables, secrets and many new modes of play

Overall 9.0. Soul Calibur 3 crams more than enough A+ content into a disk to make spending your hard earned cash worth it.

"Doom" Creators To Unleash New Mobile Game

Video game publisher Electronic Arts Inc. on Tuesday said it will offer "Orcs & Elves," a fantasy role-playing game from the makers of the blockbuster "Doom" titles, to Verizon Wireless customers later this month.

The game, created for play on mobile phones by id Software and Fountainhead Entertainment, will be available to Verizon Wireless Get it Now customers on May 9 and nationwide in July.

Electronic Arts bought Jamdat Mobile Inc. for $684 million in February in a bid to boost its presence in the global mobile games market, which research firm Screen Digest estimated to be worth $2 billion in 2005.

Lara Croft Catapults Onto the Nintendo Platforms

Eidos Interactive, one of the world’s leading publishers and developers of entertainment software, is pleased to announce further details of Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend on Nintendo GameCube, Nintendo DS and Game Boy Advance. Available this fall, the handheld versions will faithfully capture the detail and breadth of Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Xbox video game and entertainment system from Microsoft and the soon-to-be-released Nintendo GameCube version.

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend on the Nintendo platforms will deliver the same innovative level of gameplay and high production value experience that has helped the PlayStation 2 and Xbox versions rise to the top of the sales charts all over North America and Europe. Nintendo fans will be able to experience Tomb Raider’s dynamic controls, Lara’s fluid movement system, engaging puzzles, and gorgeous environments.

"There are a host of new and exciting features for Lara on the Nintendo platforms," said Senior Brand Manager Kathryn Clements. "With the stunning graphics of the original games optimised to Nintendo’s platforms, Legend will further extend the reach of the Lara universe."

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend is the seventh title to be released in the Tomb Raider series, which originally launched in 1996 and is still one of the best selling videogame franchises of all time, with over 28 million copies sold.

Crash Bandicoot Makes His Wacky Debut on Nintendo DS

Vivendi Games’ Sierra Entertainment has announced the development of Crash Boom Bang!, an exciting, humorous game that will allow players to roll the dice and dive into one of 40 action-oriented, outrageously funny, multiplayer mini-games, as they communicate with and bet against opponents through the never-before-seen "Touch Panel Communication" in-game feature. Developed by critically-acclaimed Japanese developer Dimps, Crash Boom Bang! will be available exclusively for the Nintendo DS system in October 2006.

"Crash Boom Bang! will provide the hilarious antics and fun gameplay that Crash Bandicoot fans have come to love, with a brand-new twist," said Cindy Cook, Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer for Vivendi Games. "Through the innovative Touch Panel Communication in-game feature that leverages the technology of the Nintendo DS, Crash Boom Bang! will also deliver a uniquely entertaining multiplayer experience unlike any other on the system."

In Crash Boom Bang!, Crash and his friends embark on a worldwide race in a quest for its multi-million dollar prize. With hidden intentions of finding an ancient lost city and the famed magical "Super Big Power Stone" that grants its user one wish, the race’s sponsor Viscount Devil plans on using the contestants to solve the mystery. The map of the race checkpoints is based on the Viscount’s ancient map, and the evil Dr. Neo Cortex, also an invitee to the race, has figured out the Viscount’s master plan and in his own relentless pursuit for world domination, sets out to steal the map and retrieve the legendary stone. It’s up to Crash and his friends to win the big race ... and save the world!

Key game features in Crash Boom Bang! include: * Revolutionary "Touch Panel Communication" multiplayer gameplay - Communicate with players through never-before-seen touch panel message in-game feature (speech, sounds, characters) - Use wireless LAN to send customized messages mid-game and have fun teaming up with friends or distracting other players’ gameplay

* 40 Wacky Action-oriented Mini-games Taking Full Advantage of the DS Platform - 3D graphics, touch screen, microphone, wireless network

* Unique Betting Feature - Take player interaction to a new level by betting on outcomes of multiplayer games and earning points to purchase items that can enhance the gameplay experience

* Item Collecting & Trading - Up to 80 items to collect, trade or use to alter gameplay scenarios

* Trademark Crash Humor and Characters - Enjoy Crash’s wacky and zany sense of humor and play as one of 8 of your favorite characters including Crash, Coco, Crunch and Neo Cortex

Atari Announces BattleZone for PSP System

Atari, Inc. announced the development of BattleZone for the PSP system, a modern update to the 1980 classic arcade game. BattleZone immerses players in an interactive world with relentless onslaughts of quick, action-oriented battles. In development by Paradigm Entertainment, BattleZone for the PSP system will blast onto global terrain in November 2006.

Set in futuristic international military environments, BattleZone puts players in control of highly maneuverable hover tanks, challenging them in close combat scenarios against their rivals. BattleZone features fast and furious gameplay, photo-realistic environments, eight unique customizable team vehicles, an assortment of high-powered weapons and multiplayer battles. The four-player WiFi mode lets players go head to head, while unlockable weapons, vehicles and upgrades add even greater depth to the gameplay experience. In addition, extra game content will be available through the BattleZone web site, offering gamers news, leader boards and an exclusive online level builder tool that allows players to customize game maps. The extra content can then be downloaded to the players' PSP system through a local PC-USB connection.

"The BattleZone arcade game broke the mold for vehicle action combat in 1980, and today's version will reinvent this classic property into a modern day must-have," said Stephen Baer, Senior Product Manager, Atari, Inc. "BattleZone for the PSP system offers the fast-paced action and addictive gameplay that meets the demands of today's on-the-go generation."

BattleZone provides players with six popular and well-known game modes, including Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, Team Deathmatch, Hotzone, Knockout, and Fox and Hound. For casual gamers, the single player mode offers an easy learning curve for pick-up and play gaming and a tournament progression to win upgrades and enhancements.

Designed to take advantage of the PSP system's high quality display, BattleZone's crisp environments depict military combat arenas from around the world. Specific sights include abandoned cities of Russia, jungles of China, desert canyons of the United States, Antarctica's frozen tundra and the Canary Islands. Players can fight their way through the compelling open play of ten worlds in BattleZone, two of which can be customized online and transferred to their PSP system.

Capitalizing on all the PSP system offers with quick action control, close combat gameplay, familiar game modes and WiFi capabilities, BattleZone will yet again redefine vehicle combat action for the next generation of today's portable gamers.

Islamists Using US Video Games in Youth Appeal

The makers of combat video games have unwittingly become part of a global propaganda campaign by Islamic militants to exhort Muslim youths to take up arms against the United States, officials said on Thursday.

Tech-savvy militants from al Qaeda and other groups have modified video war games so that U.S. troops play the role of bad guys in running gunfights against heavily armed Islamic radical heroes, Defense Department official and contractors told Congress.

The games appear on militant Web sites, where youths as young as 7 can play at being troop-killing urban guerillas after registering with the site's sponsors.

"What we have seen is that any video game that comes out ... they'll modify it and change the game for their needs," said Dan Devlin, a Defense Department public diplomacy specialist.

Devlin spoke before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, at which contractors from San Diego-based Science Applications International Corp., or SAIC, gave lawmakers a presentation that focused on Iraq as an engine for Islamic militant propaganda from Indonesia to Turkey and Chechnya.

SAIC has a $7 million Defense Department contract to monitor 1,500 militant Web sites that provide al Qaeda and other militant organizations with a main venue for communications, fund-raising, recruitment and training.

The sites use a variety of emotionally charged content, from images of real U.S. soldiers being hit by snipers in Iraq to video-recordings of American televangelists including Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell making disparaging remarks about Islam.

The underlying propaganda message, officials say, is that the United States is waging a crusade against Islam in order to control Middle Eastern oil, and that Muslims should fight to protect Islam from humiliation.

One of the latest video games modified by militants is the popular "Battlefield 2" from leading video game publisher, Electronic Arts Inc. of Redwood City, California.

Jeff Brown, a spokesman for Electronic Arts, said enthusiasts often write software modifications, known as "mods," to video games.

"Millions of people create mods on games around the world," he said. "We have absolutely no control over them. It’s like drawing a mustache on a picture."

"Battlefield 2" ordinarily shows U.S. troops engaging forces from China or a united Middle East coalition. But in a modified video trailer posted on Islamic Web sites and shown to lawmakers, the game depicts a man in Arab headdress carrying an automatic weapon into combat with U.S. invaders.

"I was just a boy when the infidels came to my village in Blackhawk helicopters," a narrator’s voice said as the screen flashed between images of street-level gunfights, explosions and helicopter assaults.

Then came a recording of President George W. Bush’s September 16, 2001, statement: "This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while." It was edited to repeat the word "crusade," which Muslims often define as an attack on Islam by Christianity.

Two militant videos were also pointed out to lawmakers including one called "Lion of Falluja," the city in Iraqi’s violent Anbar province that has long been seen as a symbol of militant resistance.

Critics of the U.S. video game industry have long blamed the products for violence among American teenagers in civilian society, including high-profile shootings at public schools.

SAIC executive Eric Michael said researchers suspect Islamic militants are using video games to train recruits and condition youth to attack U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq.

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Man Pleads to Murder Over PlayStation

A 29-year-old man was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty to killing a friend in a dispute over how to use a PlayStation video game console.

Arthur Demaurice Priestly pleaded guilty to murder Monday in Muscogee County Superior Court in the killing of his friend, James Edwards Jr.

Judge Bobby Peters had rejected Priestly's bid to plead guilty to the lesser charge of voluntary manslaughter.

Edwards, 24, was shot to death on March 20 at Priestly's house. The two men were drinking heavily during a barbecue when they got into an argument about whether music should be played in Priestly's PlayStation.

Edwards died from a single gunshot wound to the chest. The two men were friends and met while working together at a foundry and machine shop.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Rhode Island Embarks on Wireless Network

America's smallest state is seeking to become its first to offer a wireless broadband network from border to border.

Backers of Rhode Island's $20 million project say it would improve services and make the state a testing ground for new business technologies.

It also comes at a time when Rhode Island's capital of Providence is stepping up efforts to lure business from Boston, about a 50-minute drive away, in neighboring Massachusetts, where office rents are among the nation's most expensive.

The Rhode Island Wireless Innovation Networks (RI-WINs) should be fully in place by 2007, providing wireless connectivity throughout state, whose land mass of about 1,045 square miles is only slightly more than double the size of metropolitan Los Angeles.

A pilot project involving state agencies, Brown University and businesses

is to begin next month.

The Rhode Island network is a hybrid of WiMAX and WiFi technologies that would deliver real-time connections at a minimum speed of 1 Megabit per second (Mbps), allowing users to download a typical Hollywood-length film in about 100 minutes. The system will be supported by 120 base antennas placed throughout the state.

A few antennas, each about 3 feet to 4 feet in height, are being placed in Providence and Newport on the southern coast during the initial tests.

So far, no state outside Rhode Island has sought to build a border-to-border network, said Bob Panoff, a private consultant and the RI-WINs project manager.

While more cities are interested in becoming wireless, "there’s no groundswell of consumer support for it," said Dave McClure, president of the U.S. Internet Industry Association (USIIA), which represents Internet companies.

More than 80 U.S. cities have wireless networks, according to a study done in August 2005 by the association.

But use has been sporadic, plagued by costs and sputtering technology, said Dave McClure, the association’s president. Orlando, Florida, for example, removed its wireless network last year due to tepid use, McClure said.

The project is being funded by public and private sources, and once fully operational, users would pay $20 per month or a membership fee based on annual usage, said Saul Kaplan, acting executive director of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, a partner in the project.

"We know the demand signals are there," said Kaplan.

Officials said the network would support services including business, education, emergency, health care and port security.

During the six-month pilot phase, for example, state health inspectors will test the system by entering data from restaurant visits into laptops and sending the information to the health department.

Emergency workers will test sending patient information from an ambulance while en route to a hospital.

Graduate students at Brown University, a partner in the project, will use the wireless network when teaching public school students.

While the system is not being created for consumers, officials say it could have everyday applications, such as retrieving real-time information on the size of crowds at beaches or to access traffic information while driving.

"A broadband border-to-border network would allow us to move information to the point of need, wherever it’s needed," Kaplan said.

Creators say a prime benefit of the network will be to draw businesses looking to use Rhode Island as a laboratory to test-market new technologies on a statewide, demographically diverse population.

A study by the Rhode Island-based Business Innovation Factory, a private,

nonprofit organization that launched RI-WINs in 2004, estimated the annual cost to operate the network at $5 million.

Ballmer Boasts of Search Engine Progress

Two years after conceding his company erred in failing to develop its own search engine, Microsoft Corp. Chief Executive Steve Ballmer boasted Thursday of progress in fighting industry leaders Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc.

Microsoft has, in a relatively short time, advanced in two key areas by creating its own search engine and online advertising platform.

But the software maker still has plenty of work to do - and Ballmer admits that he'd have preferred to have gotten started sooner.

"It would've been nice, there's no question," Ballmer said Thursday in an interview with The Associated Press.

Still, Ballmer defended the company's progress so far.

"I like to tell our people, 'I like the years when we make at least a year's progress in a year,'" Ballmer said. "I think we've made more than two years' progress in the last two years, so I'm excited about that. And yet, we have a whole lot more innovation that we want to bring to these areas."

Ballmer spoke at the same online advertising conference where two years ago, he described his company's search error as "the thing I feel worst about over the last few years."

Redmond-based Microsoft only recently began using its own technology for delivering search results, and it remains substantially less popular than Google and Yahoo. Nielsen/Net Ratings reported that Google had 49 percent of the U.S. search market share in March, while Yahoo had 22.5 percent and MSN Search had 11 percent.

Microsoft executives have repeatedly argued that the industry is just beginning to understand the potential of Internet search and that Microsoft is in it for the long term.

"I think we'll look back on this as the DOS era of search," said Christopher Payne, a corporate vice president in charge of Windows Live Search, referencing the very early days of the computer operating system.

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates, speaking at the same conference Wednesday, conceded that Google has done "a great job" on building a search engine and advertising platform.

But he insisted Microsoft's effort is strong.

"I think this is one of the rare cases where we're being underestimated," Gates said.

On Thursday, Ballmer reiterated the company's dedication to improving its search position.

"We are hardcore about having the best search offering ourselves, with our partners," Ballmer said. "We'll just keep at it and at it and at it, and I have confidence in our ability to build a loyal user base."

Getting more people to use its search engine - and potentially see advertising on it - will be one way that Microsoft can succeed with its online advertising platform, adCenter.

But Ballmer said the search engine is just one piece of the puzzle.

The ambitious platform aims to eventually let companies advertise across multiple Microsoft products, including television and online video games, so Ballmer said the company's success also depends on things like drawing more people to its MSN portal, e-mail and instant-messaging offerings.

Microsoft is pouring money into its MSN online arm, which it sees as a key area of growth. Ballmer said Thursday the company plans to spend $1.1 billion in research and development for that unit in its fiscal year ending in June 2007, up from $500 million in the 2005 fiscal year and $700 million in the current fiscal year.

Ballmer said Microsoft's No. 1 research and development priority is to develop ways to deliver software as a service over the Internet, rather than in more traditional ways such as a CD in a retail box.

That fast-growing and highly competitive field includes everything from consumer offerings such as e-mail and photo-sharing to business applications that can be accessed online.

Companies ranging from Google to Salesforce.com Inc. have found success in this field, while Microsoft still mostly delivers its software in more traditional ways. But Ballmer said Thursday he doesn't think the company is lagging its competitors, noting that Microsoft has strong technical expertise and a loyal online user base with products like its MSN Messenger.

Microsoft's plans to substantially increase overall research and development costs through the company's next fiscal year surprised analysts last week and sent Microsoft shares tumbling.

In the wake of Wall Street's reaction, Ballmer said he realized he needs to do a better job of persuading investors to be optimistic about how the increased spending could boost long-term growth.

"I have tried to be clear with our shareholders ... that there was a whole bunch of new innovation that we were investing in that I thought could drive growth," Ballmer said. "I think maybe people heard me more about the opportunity to drive growth than they heard me about the need to invest to drive growth."

Yahoo Faces Class-Action Spyware, Ad-Sales Suit

An antispyware activist and lawyer has filed a class-action lawsuit against Yahoo, accusing the Web heavyweight of placing advertisements on spyware-vendor and "low-quality" sites.

Ben Edelman, a Massachusetts lawyer and spyware researcher, is one of the

lawyers who filed the lawsuit earlier this week on behalf of Yahoo advertiser Crafts By Veronica, as well as other advertisers. The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in New Jersey, accuses Yahoo and its ad sales subsidiary Overture Services Inof charging higher rates for ads promised "premium" placement, but then placing those ads on spyware-vendor sites and on Web pages with URLs that are misspellings of popular sites.

The lawsuit seeks to recover the money advertisers paid to Yahoo for premium, "highly targeted," ad placement at Web sites including ones owned by Microsoft and CNN, Edelman said. Although plaintiffs' lawyers have not released an estimate of damages, it could run into the hundreds of millions of dollars, he added.

"It seems like there's a lot of money at issue," Edelman said.

The lawsuit accuses Yahoo of placing ads on sites run by Intermix Media and Direct Revenue, two companies identified in an April lawsuit by New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer as distributors of spyware and unwanted pop-up adware. Both companies have disputed Spitzer's charges.

Edelman agrees with Spitzer's assessment of the two companies, he said. "It's software that at least sometimes gets on your computer without your permission," he said. "It tracks where you go online."

In addition, Yahoo places ads on so-called "typosquatting" Web sites, the lawsuit says. Typosquatters register Web sites that have URLs that are common misspellings of popular Web brands, and many typosquatting sites that Yahoo placed premium ads have long lists of advertisements as their only content, the lawsuit says. Ads placed with Yahoo have appeared on Expedai.com, a typosquatter of the popular Expedia.com travel site, the lawsuit says.

AOL To Offer AIM Users Free Phone Numbers

AOL is set to offer its instant-messaging users a free phone number to use for incoming calls, and for a fee, the ability to call regular phones from the software.

The move brings AOL Instant Messenger, or AIM, closer in functionality to voice-oriented applications like eBay Inc.'s Skype and so-called voice over Internet services from Vonage Holdings Corp. and others.

Skype last week reached 100 million registered users. AOL has 80 million registered users of AIM and ICQ, a similar program.

AIM began a decade ago as a text-based chat program and gradually added voice and video communication tools. But without the ability to connect to the regular telephone network, AIM users were largely limited to conducting voice chats with one another.

AOL, the Internet unit of Time Warner Inc., will start offering the free numbers this month. It won't be possible to move existing phone numbers to the service.

AIM will alert users to incoming calls through display windows with ads on the user's computer screen. When the user is not online, calls will go to voicemail.

AOL said the extra phone number will be attractive to people who have concerns about revealing their home number or who want to keep commercial and social activities separate. It sees daters and job seekers as possible users.

For $14.95 a month, users will be able upgrade to Phoneline Unlimited, which gives free outbound calling from a computer to the United States, Canada, and 30 other countries.

The free incoming number and flat-rate outbound fee are unusual approaches: Most competitors charge a flat rate for an incoming number and per minute for outgoing calls. Skype, for instance, charges $38 per year for a U.S. number, and around 2 cents per minute for outgoing calls.

However, Skype has had much more traction overseas than in the United States, where phone tariffs are generally lower.

John McKinley, AOL's president of digital services, said AIM Phoneline's fee model is a better match for the U.S. market.

AOL also expects to make money from coming premium features like custom ringtones and call forwarding.

The calling features will only be available on the Windows version of AIM. McKinley said the company was looking at expanding the service to Wi-Fi enabled handsets before porting it to AIM versions on other platforms, like Macintosh computers.

AOL also said it will introduce a beta, or trial version, of AIM Pages, which lets users create their own Web pages, with addresses based on their AIM user names. Users can keep track of updates to their friends' sites through AIM.

The concept is similar to MySpace and other social networking sites, another growth area in recent years.

Microsoft May Delay Windows Vista Again

Microsoft Corp.'s long- awaited release of the upgrade to its flagship Windows operating system will likely be delayed again by at least three months, research group Gartner Inc. said on Tuesday.

The research note, released to clients on Monday, said the new Windows Vista operating system is too complex to be able to meet Microsoft's targeted November release for volume license customers and January launch for retail consumers.

A Microsoft spokeswoman said the company disagreed with the Gartner report and it was still on track to meet its launch dates.

Vista is the first major overhaul of its operating system, which sits on 90 percent of the world's computers and accounts for nearly a third of Microsoft's total revenue, since Microsoft rolled out Windows XP nearly five years ago.

Microsoft originally targeted a 2005 launch for the new Windows, then

pushed the release out to 2006 before announcing in March that Vista would again be delayed to improve the product’s quality.

Gartner targets a Windows Vista release in the April-June quarter of 2007, nine to 12 months after Microsoft conducts a second major test, or "beta," release for Vista during the current quarter.

"Microsoft still wants to get it out as soon as possible, but slipping from January to March is nowhere near as bad as slipping from shipping before the holidays to after the holidays," a group of Gartner analysts wrote in the report.

Gartner said Windows XP took five months to go from a second test release to the start of production, but the magnitude of technological improvement in Vista is closer to Windows 2000, which took 16 months between the second test and production.

Once production starts, it usually takes between six- to eight-weeks for PC manufacturers to load the operating system onto new computers, Gartner said.

MySpace Faces Call To Crackdown on Predators

Massachusetts on Tuesday called on popular teen social networking Web site MySpace.com to strengthen protection of children against sexual predators, including raising the minimum age for users to 18 from 14.

The arrest on Tuesday of a 27-year-old man in Connecticut on charges of illegal sexual contact with a 13-year-old girl he met through MySpace underlines the risks of the fast-growing Internet site that boasts about 60 million members.

"MySpace has not taken sufficient steps to ensure that the MySpace Web site is a safe place for minors," Massachusetts Attorney General Tom Reilly said in a letter to MySpace.

He said a three-month investigation found that potential child predators were surfing MySpace seeking chats with potential victims and violent images or content were being posted to bully children.

"An adult can register as a minor member and use that profile to seek access to the profiles of countless underage members," he said in a statement.

MySpace allows teenagers and young adults to find friends and express themselves by posting profiles and blogs, or Web journals covering everything from their favorite singers to schoolwork and intimate personal details.

It generated a blizzard of headlines in national media this year that have raised alarm with parents and school authorities - from "Man arrested in MySpace.com teen-sex case" to "Sex predators are stalking MySpace; is your teenager a target?"

Connecticut authorities said in March that two men - one age 22 and the other 39 - were arrested on allegations they had sexual contact with minors they met through MySpace. Another man was arrested early on Tuesday at a

Connecticut hotel after a mother reported her daughter missing.

In February, California police arrested a 26-year-old for felony child molestation after he met a 14-year-old on MySpace.

"It’s happening more and more all the time, both through MySpace and through chatrooms and other blogging sites," said Christina Slenk, a director of Web Wise Kids, a nonprofit Internet safety organization based in California.

Reilly, a Democrat running for governor, said his staff raised the state’s concerns in a March meeting with officials at MySpace, which media mogul Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. bought for $580 million last year.

MySpace authorities were not immediately available to comment but its chief executive, Chris DeWolfe, told Reuters in March that it had several measures in place to prevent abuse.

He said the site prohibits children under age 14 from using it and restricts access to the profiles of 14- and 15-year-olds, allowing them to be contacted only by users that they add to their buddy lists.

MySpace also uses software to identify minors, flagging profiles with terms likely to be used by children under age 14. But DeWolfe said there was no fool-proof way to verify the age of all users.

Reilly said his investigation found that the safeguards failed. He asked MySpace to install an age and identity verification system, equip Web pages with a "Report Inappropriate Content" link, respond to all reports of inappropriate content within 24 hours and significantly raise the number of staff who review images and content.

He also wants filters to block sexually explicit or violent images, deletion of profiles of people who have abused the site, removal of all advertisements deemed inappropriate for children and free software that allows parents to block MySpace.

Court Orders Spyware Operator to Pay $4M

A federal court has ordered a man who was at the center of the nation’s first "spyware" case to give up $4 million in ill-gotten gains.

Sanford Wallace was accused by the Federal Trade Commission of running an operation that infected computers with software that caused flurries of pop-up ads. It then tried to sell consumers cures called "Spy Wiper" and "Spy Deleter" for $30.

The order issued Wednesday by U.S. District Court in New Hampshire bars Wallace and his company, SmartBot.net Inc., from spreading spyware.

The FTC first accused Wallace of the spyware operation in a 2004 lawsuit. Last year, under an agreement with the FTC, Wallace agreed to stop infecting computers with the advertising programs.

Wallace, formerly of Barrington, has said he did nothing wrong and that he was being persecuted because of his past involvement in junk Internet mailings.

Wallace had said SmartBot offered business-to-business "permission-based" e-mail services. Back in 2004, he said SmartBot has long been dormant.

Wallace headed a company called Cyber Promotions in the 1990s that sent as many as 30 million junk e-mails daily to consumers, earning him the nicknames "Spamford" and "spam king." He left the company after lawsuits from America Online and CompuServe.

In a related case Thursday, the government reached a settlement with Jared Lansky, an ad broker who disseminated ads containing Wallace's spyware. He is to give up $227,000 in ill-gotten gains.

In another case, Walter Rines of Stratham and his company, Odysseus Marketing, was also barred from spreading spyware. The FTC plans to ask the court to order them to give up their ill-gotten gains.

State and federal officials have been trying to combat the spread of spyware, unwanted programs that sneak onto computers, can bombard users with pop-up ads and drain processing power to the point of rendering computers unusable.

"Aggressive enforcement of this sort is absolutely vital if we're to continue our progress in battle against spyware," said Ari Schwartz, deputy director of the Center for Democracy and Technology. "

Macs Are Virus Targets, Some Experts Warn

Benjamin Daines was browsing the Web when he clicked on a series of links that promised pictures of an unreleased update to his computer's operating system.

Instead, a window opened on the screen and strange commands ran as if the machine was under the control of someone - or something - else.

Daines was the victim of a computer virus.

Such headaches are hardly unusual on PCs running Microsoft Corp.'s Windows operating system. Daines, however, was using a Mac - an Apple Computer Inc. machine often touted as being immune to such risks.

He and at least one other person who clicked on the links were infected by what security experts call the first-ever virus for Mac OS X, the operating system that has shipped with every Mac sold since 2001 and has survived virtually unscathed from the onslaught of malware unleashed on the Internet in recent years.

"It just shows people that no matter what kind of computer you use you are still open to some level of attack," said Daines, a 29-year-old British chemical engineer who once considered Macs invulnerable to such attacks.

Apple's iconic status, growing market share and adoption of same microprocessors used in machines running Windows are making Macs a bigger target, some experts warn.

Apple's most recent wake-up call came last week, as a Southern California researcher reported seven new vulnerabilities. Tom Ferris said malicious

Web sites can exploit the holes without a user's knowledge, potentially allowing a criminal to execute code remotely and gain access to passwords and other sensitive information.

Ferris said he warned Apple of the vulnerabilities in January and February and that the company has yet to patch the holes, prompting him to compare the Cupertino-based computer maker to Microsoft three years ago, when the world's largest software company was criticized for being slow to respond to weaknesses in its products.

"They didn't know how to deal with security, and I think Apple is in the same situation now," said Ferris, himself a Mac user.

Apple officials point to the company's virtually unvarnished security track record and disputed claims that Mac OS X is more susceptible to attack now than in the past.

Apple plans to patch the holes reported by Ferris in the next automatic update of Mac OS X, and there have been no reports of them being exploited, spokeswoman Natalie Kerris said. She disagreed that the vulnerabilities make it possible for a criminal to run code on a targeted machine.

In Daines' infection, a bug in the virus' code prevented it from doing much damage. Still, several of his operating system files were deleted, several new files were created and several applications, including a program for recording audio, were crippled.

Behind the scenes, the virus also managed to hijack his instant messaging program so the rogue file was blasted to 10 people on his buddy list.

"A lot of Mac users are in denial and have blinders on that say, 'Nothing is ever going to get to us,'" said Neil Fryer, a computer security consultant who works for an international financial institution in Britain. "I can't say I agree with them."

Fryer, also a Mac user, said he has begun taking additional precautions over the past year to make sure he doesn't fall victim to an attack. He spends more time than in the past scrutinizing his security logs for signs of intruders, and he uses a firewall and additional security applications, just as he would with a Windows-based machine.

Among the other signs Macs are a growing target:

The SANS Institute, a computer-security organization in Bethesda, Md., added Mac OS X to its 2005 list of the top-20 Internet vulnerabilities. It was the first time the Mac has been included since the experts started compiling the list in 2000.

This week, SANS updated the list to warn against flaws in Safari, the Mac Web browser, which the group said criminals were able to attack before Apple could fix it.

The number of discovered Mac vulnerabilities has soared in recent years, with 81 found last year, up from 46 in 2004 and 27 in 2003, according to the Open Source Vulnerability Database, which is maintained by a nonprofit group that tracks security vulnerabilities on many different hardware and software platforms.

Less than a week after Daines was attacked in mid-February, a 25-year-old computer security researcher released three benign Mac-based worms to

prove a serious vulnerability in Mac OS X could be exploited. Apple asked the man, Kevin Finisterre, to hold off publishing the code until it could patch the flaw.

The Mac’s vulnerability could also increase as Apple transitions to a product line that uses microprocessors made by Intel Corp., security experts said.

With new Macs running the same processor that powers Windows-based machines, far more people will know how to exploit weaknesses in Apple machines than in the past, when they ran on the PowerPC chips made by IBM Corp. and Motorola Corp. spinoff Freescale Semiconductor Inc.

"They have eliminated their genetic diversity," said independent security consultant Rodney Thayer. "The fear is that we’re going to run into a new class of attacks."

Bud Tribble, Apple’s senior vice president of software technology, disagreed.

"All the things we’ve been doing to make Mac OS X secure continue to be relevant on Intel," he said.

Mac OS X, he said, is designed to be Internet safe out of the box, without the need for firewalls or additional security software. He praised Mac OS X for making it easy for users to automatically install security patches.

He noted that the operating system was derived from FreeBSD, open source software that was built from the ground up to provide security for computers networked together. Since its origins in the early 1990s, the Unix-based FreeBSD has continually been battle-tested by college students and computer security specialists.

"The bottom line is we still feel more comfortable using a Mac than a (Windows) PC," said Alan Paller, director of research for SANS.

But as Daines can attest, there are no guarantees.

"We’re all sort of waiting with bated breath to see if any problem will happen and the jury is still out," said Thayer, the independent security consultant. "I don’t think you’ll find a consensus."

Spammers Turn On Anti-spam Vigilantes

An effort to force spammers to stop soliciting certain e-mail addresses went bad on Monday, after at least one spammer began sending large volumes of unsolicited e-mail to members of a "Do Not Spam" list run by Israeli firm Blue Security.

In recent days, e-mail users who had registered for Blue Security’s "Do Not Intrude" list have instead been the target of a spam campaign and received extortion e-mail messages threatening to continue the campaigns unless the users remove their name from the Do Not Intrude registry, according to CEO Eran Reshef.

The message claims that Blue Security is "not playing fair," and that members can only avoid spam messages by removing their name from the Blue

Security list.

"You are receiving this email because you are a member of Blue Security," the message reads, in part. "Due to the tactics used by Blue Security, you will end up receiving this message, or other nonsensical spams 20-40 times more than you would normally."

Blue Security launched its "Do Not Intrude" list in November, 2005. The company claims to have 500,000 registered e-mail addresses in its database, and business relationships with other anti-spam firms.

The Do Not Intrude program allows individuals to register an e-mail address with Blue Security and tracks spam messages with desktop client software known as "Blue Frog." When spam e-mail is sent to a Do Not Intrude Member, Blue Security traces the message to its origin, and then bombards the Web site behind the campaign, known as the "sponsor," with requests to remove the e-mail message from his or her distribution lists. Millions of e-mail messages translate into millions of "opt out" requests, bogging down the spammers' servers.

The spam campaign is a sign of Blue Security's success and an act of frustration by a major spammer based in Russia, Reshef said.

"It's one of the top spammers. We're not sure which one at this point, but six of the top ten are complying with (Blue Security), so it's one of the remaining four," Reshef said.

Blue Security's growth in recent months has forced major spam operations in Russia accounting for around 25 percent of the 4.5 million e-mails Blue Security receives each week to stop sending to Blue Security members, Reshef claims.

"We've reached an inflection point," Reshef said.

Reshef claims that the spam campaign did not reach all Blue Security's Do Not Intrude members. Contrary to some reports, the Do Not Intrude database was not breached and members' e-mails are not at risk.

Instead, one spammer compared the scrubbed and actual e-mail list to derive the addresses of Do Not Intrude members, and then began targeting them, Reshef said.

An attack also took Blue Security's Web page offline in the past two days, which Reshef believes is related to the spam campaign against Do Not Intrude members, although the company is still researching the problem.

Blue Security hopes to have its Web site back up soon and Reshef said it is undeterred by the attack on its members.

"This is a sign that (Do Not Intrude) is working. We've finally created something that spammers actually care about," Reshef said.

Should You Be Fired for Using the Internet While at Work?

The growing list of communications technologies that links workers to the workplace 24/7 increasingly is blurring the lines between work and home.

Employees surf the Web at work, checking the weather, making travel plans, and shopping. At home, many send e-mail, continue their work chores on the Internet, and otherwise stay connected with their professional lives.

While employers rarely discourage the extra work done at home, many want employees' attention focused on work while at the office.

In a recent decision, a New York City administrative law judge adds another angle to the debate between employers and employees over personal use of the Internet in the workplace. Ruling in the case of an employee who allegedly used the Internet for personal reasons during work hours, the judge, John B. Spooner, compared Internet use at work to reading a newspaper or making a telephone call.

"It should be observed," Spooner wrote, "that the Internet has become the modern equivalent of a telephone or a daily newspaper, providing a combination of communication and information that most employees use as frequently in their personal lives as for their work."

Spooner recommended that Toquir Choudhri, a 14-year veteran of the city Department of Education, receive the slightest reprimand for insubordination, even though supervisors wanted him fired for using the Internet for personal matters after he was told not to.

Lee Rainie of the Pew Internet and American Life Project says it "sounds like the judge was recognizing a reality for lots of workers."

Rainie says the "boundary between work and leisure, work and home, is becoming more permeable."

The New York administrative court's rulings serve as recommendations to city department heads who make a final decision. In fiscal year 2005, 99 percent of department heads agreed with the findings and altogether rejected just 16 percent of the recommendations.

Despite the mixing of work and personal time, employers fear the loss of salaried time from workers who are not devoting all their workplace time to, well, work.

A recent survey by Salary.com claims employers waste $759 billion per year paying for employees who are online for personal reasons. But Rainie calls this and other reports like it "junk pieces of research" because they don't account for work at home.

And a December 2002 survey conducted by the University of Maryland supports Rainie. The survey finds that workers with Internet access at home and at work used an average of 3.7 hours per week of work time for personal Internet use. But they spend more time, 5.9 hours per week, surfing for work outside office hours.

Existing case law, Rainie says, gives employers the right to dictate how their computers are used, but generally such rules "get to different aspects of the same question: How do people spend their time? What are they supposed to be doing when they're on the job? What do they actually do on their job?"

For Choudhri, the veteran of New York City's Department of Education who could possibly still lose his job despite this initial ruling in his favor, the answer to these questions is pretty clear. Much like fellow employees, Choudhri used the Internet during down time.

In one instance, Choudhri was reprimanded for checking the weather on the Internet while eating his lunch, Spooner writes in the decision.

Martin Druyan, Choudhri’s lawyer says, "If everyone in the office has no work and everyone is on the Internet, unless management gives them work or forbids them from doing it, then people are going to use the Internet."

"This saga is not over," Druyan says. "We’re midstream here, something is gonna happen."

Since the March 9 ruling, the embattled employee has spent 30 days suspended without pay. He is back on the payroll, the department says, but he is not at work.

The Department of Education says Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein is expected to make a final decision sometime during the week of April 30.

More Professors Ban Laptops in Class

As the professor lectured on the law, the student wore a poker face. But that was probably because, under the guise of taking notes on his laptop, the student actually was playing poker - online, using the school’s wireless Internet connection. The scenario is not uncommon in today’s college classrooms, and some instructors want it stopped. So they have done the unthinkable - banned laptops.

The move caused an uproar at the University of Memphis, where law professor June Entman nixed the computers in March because she felt they were turning her students into stenographers and inhibiting classroom debate.

Students rebelled by filing a complaint with the American Bar Association, although the organization dismissed it.

At the University of Pennsylvania, law professor Charles Mooney banned laptops from his classes two years ago for similar reasons.

Around that time, said Mooney, he was serving as an expert witness in a lawsuit. During a break in his deposition, he recalled asking the stenographer if she found the case interesting. She replied that she didn’t remember anything she had taken down, Mooney said.

"I thought, ’That’s what my students are doing,’" he said.

The ban led to "a lot of grumbling," Mooney said. Some students even dropped the class.

But as an experiment, the professor permitted laptops this past year to compare the difference in students’ performance. His conclusion: Don’t allow laptops.

Penn law student Karen Yeh, 23, said a laptop prohibition in one of her classes this past year was unnecessary. The embarrassing possibility of being unable to answer a question posed by the professor was reason enough for students to pay attention.

"Nobody would’ve been surfing the Net," Yeh said. "You’re just too scared

to get called on."

But some students said online distractions are really no different from pre-laptop days, when they might do a crossword puzzle in class.

Ryan McKenzie, a third-year Penn law student, said so much of students' knowledge is gleaned outside the classroom that in-class distractions don't detract from learning.

"The class is only a small part of the whole experience," said McKenzie, 29. "It's much more independent study."

Paul Engelking, a chemistry professor at the University of Oregon, said he was disturbed to find students gambling online while they were purportedly working on an in-class assignment.

Yet even students who are diligently taking notes with their laptops are missing out on social interaction and jokes the teachers make, he said.

"There isn't even eye contact going on in the classroom," said Engelking.

One remedy instructors have, he said, is to establish penalties for Web surfing, codify them in a course syllabus, and then enforce them.

But even that leaves a lot to be desired, Engelking said.

"I'm not completely thrilled about being a policeman in my own lecture hall," he said. "I've got enough things to do."

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